

Using Non-Traditional Methods to Fight Irregular Wars

Subject Area Warfighting

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Since the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, the United States has conducted a new type of war. This war is taking place all across the globe, but most importantly it is being fought in the coffee shops, mosques, and living rooms of Muslims. The war is not going to be won in the physical realm, in which most of America's war fighters are comfortable. The strategic corporal/strategic captain concept is not longer a cliché; it is a reality. The saying demonstrates how actions in the tactical level of war impact the operational and strategic levels of war. Today's wars are complex and require innovation and an understanding of how tactical actions have strategic consequences. Commanders at the tactical level must be able to apply all elements of national power to effectively target the conditions that foster and perpetuate an insurgency.

Background

In an insurgency, there is a segment of the population that provides various degrees of support to the insurgency. If not outright support in the form of money, safe harbor and a sympathetic blind eye, this segment of the population may simply tolerate the existence and activity of the insurgent. Influence over this group of fence sitters, often described as the target audience (TA), must be the

primary objective of all military operations to include information operations (IO), civil/military operations (CMO), government support operations, and security operations.

Without control of the target audience, the insurgency would not have a support base, recruit population and the cover and concealment of a civilian population. Mao ZeDong's once said, "What is a true bastion of iron? It is the masses, the millions upon millions of people who genuinely and sincerely support the revolution. That is the real iron bastion..."¹ Mao's iron bastion is the objective of today's insurgency. This quote demonstrates the importance Mao placed on the will of the people. Without popular support, the insurgency will achieve desired results. Due to the target audience's prominence, many have identified it as the operational center of gravity.² While this point is debatable, the importance of the target audience is not.

With the question of importance answered, the next point to consider is how best to influence this target audience. Successful practices in modern insurgencies demonstrate that the overriding importance is to develop the government to a point in which it is strong enough to

1 Be Concerned with the Well-Being of the Masses, Pay Attention to Methods of Work" (January 27, 1934), Selected Works, Vol. I. p. 150

2 Campbell, James D. "French Algeria and British Northern Ireland: Legitimacy and the Rule of Law in Low-Intensity Conflict" Military Review Vol. 85 Issue 2 p. 2

provide for basic services, protection of civil liberties, law enforcement, and a democratic political process. Excessive military operations specifically alienate the target audience and serve to strengthen only the insurgency. The United States, while in a support role, will be seen as an occupier when it applies its conventional forces in a traditional military role.³

Contemporary Concerns

Following the fall of Saddam Hussein and his Baath party in 2003, the United States found itself ill prepared to deal with the insurgency that followed major combat operations. The ensuing "peace" and difficulty installing an Iraqi government has taken far longer to achieve than planners originally calculated. Nonetheless, the current Iraq consists of a fledgling democratically elected government that is attempting to establish legitimacy and to provide the basic functions of government. The current Iraqi government relies heavily on the United States monetary support, technological support, security and infrastructure. The current Iraqi government would not exist nor can it maintain itself without significant United States support. Counter to the current governments efforts is an insurgency attempting to destabilize and de-

³ Sepp, Kalev I. "Best Practices in Counterinsurgency" Military Review May-June 2005 P. 8

legitimize the current government. Needless to say, the consent of the average Iraqi is the objective of the Iraqi Government and the insurgent.

The early stages of the post war Iraq rebuilding phase saw the implementation of the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) as the lead agency for the "security, essential services, economy, and governance" during the rebuilding of Iraq. ⁴From day one, the CPA was unable to accomplish its assigned goals. As an ad hoc organization, the CPA suffered from a lack of organization, leadership, and cumbersome regulation. In the end, the CPA did little to provide anything of value to the target audience. Conversely, a clumsy yet dangerous insurgency was in its infancy. While there was little the insurgency had to offer the TA in terms of financial opportunity and the like, there was a deep religious and cultural affiliation and appeal.

The CPA's inability to provide basic necessities, in particular adequate health care, was a result of a rigid centralized decision-making and decision approving process.⁵ Other failures of the CPA included public works, education, and basic security through indigenous forces eroded public

4 Coalition Provisional Authority. "An Historic Review of CPA Accomplishments" <http://www.cpa-iraq.org/pressreleases/20040628_historic_review_cpa.doc>

5 Brown, Hannah. "An Opportunity Lost" The Lancet 364(2004) 15-18.

support for the coalition presence. These failures were particularly dangerous for the United States because the Arab population is predisposed to xenophobia and harbors anti-western ideology. Had the CPA and ultimately the United States been more capable to provide basic services and security, research suggests that the state of the TA would be more solidly aligned with the United States, thus reducing the conditions necessary for the insurgent to operate (destroy the operational Center of Gravity.)⁶

A Working Solution

Military experts predict a migration toward non-linear, non-contiguous battlefields. Tomorrow's fights will be against irregular opponents as the United States supports friendly governments.⁷ Further, insurgencies will continue to abandon large-scale battlefields, such as those seen during the Chinese revolution and the Vietnam conflict, due to a significant firepower imbalance with the United States military. The future insurgent will see the value in urban terrain because of his proximity to a base of support, a target rich environment (such as government provided services: electricity, sanitation, security forces, etc.) and as part of an effort to play out his

6 Shehata, Samer. "Losing Hearts and Minds: Understanding America's Failure in Iraq." Georgetown Journal of International Affairs. Winter 2005: p.71 <<http://www.proquest.com>>
7 Lind, William. "The Changing Face of War, Into the Fourth Generation" Marine Corps Gazette. Oct 1989 p 22

actions to a world audience⁸ Based on these considerations, the problem is not going away. Counter insurgency operations must include a workable strategy that addresses all the elements required to defeat an insurgency through winning the target audience.

As already established, the target audience is vital to the insurgency and the government. The discussion of the CPA illustrates the "wrong" means of supporting a friendly government. Based on the need to provide for the needs of the target audience and the lack of a suitable agency within the United States Foreign Service, an alternative must to be found. The United States military offers one potential solution to the problem. The CPA's requirement to provide security, essential services, economy, and governance assistance to Iraq could easily and more effectively be provided by the United States military. In fact, each of the four pillars of support identified in the mission of the CPA can and is being provided by the military.

As has been the case since 2003, a tactical commander has "ownership" of virtually every area of Iraq through the system of assigning an area of operation (AO) to specific commanders. This responsibility is usually delegated

⁸ Taw, Jennifer M and Hoffman, Bruce. The Urbanization of Insurgency; The Potential Challenges to U. S. Army Operations. Santa Monica: Rand, 1994

ultimately to the company level. The strategic captain then is responsible for the area, usually focused on improving the security environment in order to allow the government to introduce stabilization through a variety of means.

The U. S. military has an established leadership structure, uses mission type orders, and possesses a significant number of personnel and equipment. Compared to the failed CPA, the military would have been a better choice for leadership of post war Iraq. The challenge is linking the tactical commander to the operational center of gravity, an "un-natural act" for many military traditionalists. However, the tactical commander must view the fight for the hearts and minds as his own. His fight is the Foreign Service's fight, specifically because none of the traditional military actions the tactical commander makes will defeat an insurgency.

Tactical Commanders Role

The tactical commander, under the military heading of information operations, can employ non-traditional weapons against the insurgency. In support of winning the operational fight, the tactical commander can provide an excellent opportunity to influence the target audience.

Successfully projecting an image of progress with respect to the strength of the government will help influence the target audience. By incorporating indigenous security forces, even if in a minor supporting role, the proper image is projected. Further, well disciplined, mature troops will be less offensive to the target audience, particularly if they are well versed in proper cultural behaviors. Continued efforts by those public affairs servicemen will only enhance the effectiveness of proper image management.

Another method of influencing the target audience is by "staying on message". This idea is not new, and given the significant interaction U. S. troops have with the Iraqi population, it is important that the message relayed to the target audience is informative, appropriate, and easily delivered. Constant re-enforcement of the mission and purpose to the average Iraqi citizen will help defeat the insurgency by turning the target audience against the insurgent. Offering the target audience an alternative to the one proposed by the insurgency will give options favorable to the United States efforts.

Lastly, financial support to the population can effectively separate the target audience from the insurgency. By providing the target audience an interest

improving the future, the group will be much more receptive to the United States message. Steady employment, civic improvements, and the capability to provide the basic necessities will diminish the conditions necessary for the insurgency to grow and flourish. The military has already proven itself capable of using money to positively impact the target audience. The tactical commander will know where money will be best spent to influence his AO. Lessons learned from the current operating environment need to be captured, refined and incorporated.⁹

Counter Argument

There is an argument the military is not a surrogate for the State Department, and not in the business of nation building¹⁰. Others will argue that a permanent organization similar to the British colonial system of governance should be a part of the U. S. Foreign Service¹¹. This arguments fails because the United States Military, while well prepared to fight the big wars has found itself in Small Wars much more frequently.

Conclusion

Based on emerging threats, the United States is in danger of finding itself the only one who still fights a

⁹ Martins, Mark "No Small Change of Soldiering: The Commanders Emergency Response Program (CERP) in Iraq and Afghanistan" The Army Lawyer February 2004

¹⁰ Krepinevich, Andrew F. The Army and Vietnam John Hopkins University Press: 1986

¹¹ Boot, Max. "The Struggle to Transform the Military" Foreign Affairs. Col 84 pg 103

"regular" war. Because of the nature of future wars, the ability of the tactical commander to fight beyond the physical realm will determine success. The tactical commanders ability to employ non-traditional methods will be the difference between operational success or perpetuated insurgency.

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